

~ STORY ~



PROPHECY

Chapter 1



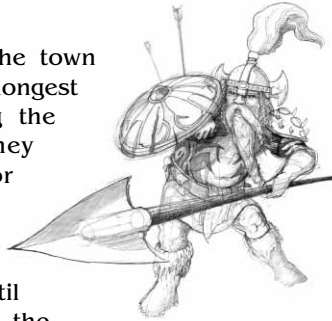
hey attacked without mercy when they reached our outer farmsteads. None were spared. I can bear witness that the demons went out of their way to hunt and kill children. Such brutality was more than an act of war - the hellspawn saw us as bestial vermin - they killed our young as we kill the young of the rats we find in our barns. The exiled mages who had summoned the hell-born exercised little control over the actions of such monstrous allies and, in any case, few of the wizards wished to rein them in.

Over thirty years before, Duke Hark Ferol had assassinated their grandmaster and betrayed their order, driving them into exile. Now the mages had returned to exact full and terrible vengeance on the children of their enemy. The butchery in the farmlands did, however, delay the wizards and their demons for several days, and in that time we prepared ourselves in Rivertown.



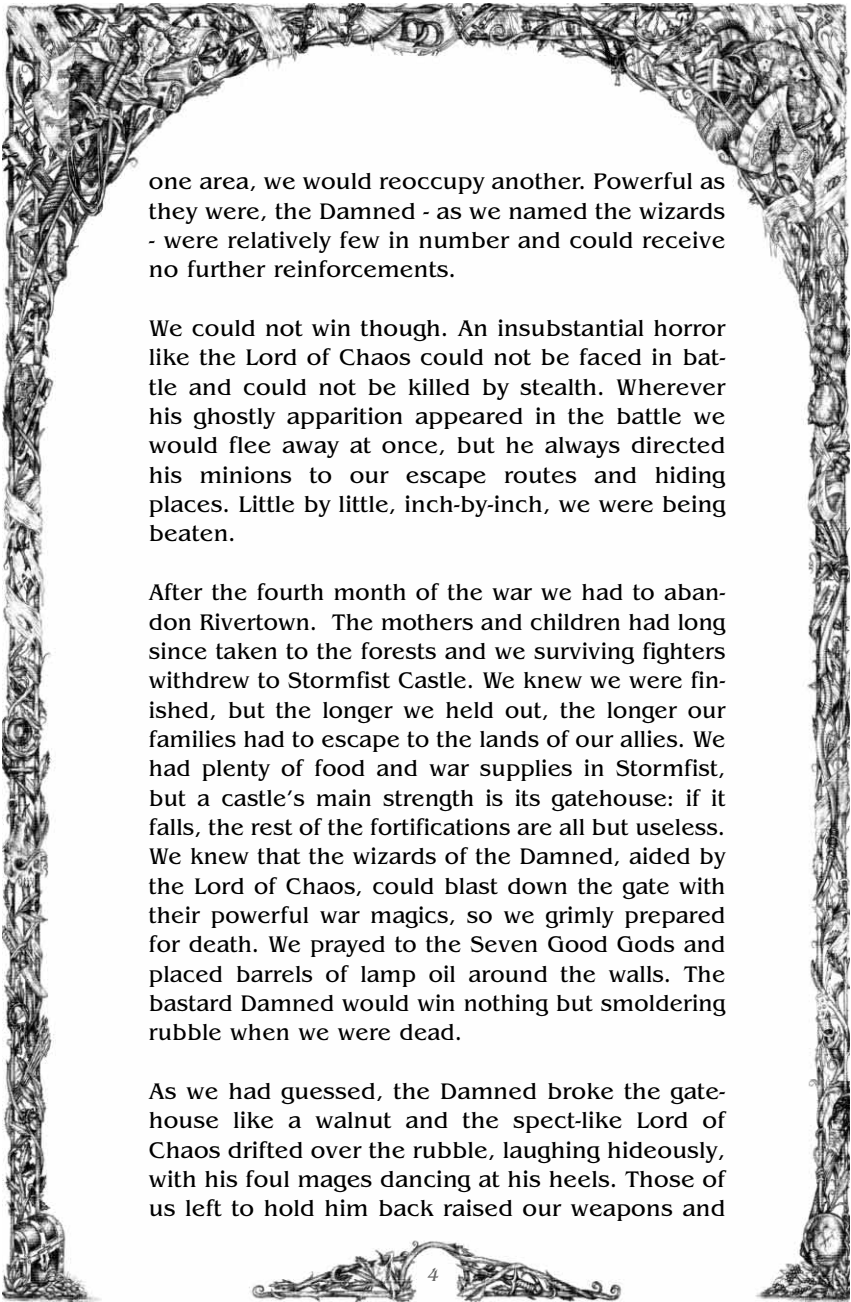
We knew that an open battle against magic-wielders and a phantom as terrible as the Lord of Chaos could only end in defeat and rout, so we prepared to fight from house to house and from street to street.

The wizards arrived at the town gate at midnight on the longest day of the year. Seeing the gates thrown open, they thought us cowering or fled, and so marched in like conquerors. On the rooftops my fellow archers and I waited until they were well through the



archway. The order was given and burning pots of oil were thrown down to give us more light, then we rose up and feathered the bastards with flight after flight of poisoned arrows. Their war magics eventually drove us back, but we had felled dozens of the mage-lords and even a few of the demons before we took to our heels.

The following four months were a nightmare of sneaking, hunting and killing in the rubble of our ruined town. The wizards blasted down buildings and torched whole wards while their pet demons stalked us like wolves after foxes. Yet we townsfolk learned the weaknesses of damned wizard and foul demon alike. We drew small groups into ambushes or cut their throats while they slept or drove arrow shafts through their black hearts - they paid for every little victory in blood. We organized ourselves into many small skirmishing bands and as fast as they would drive us out of



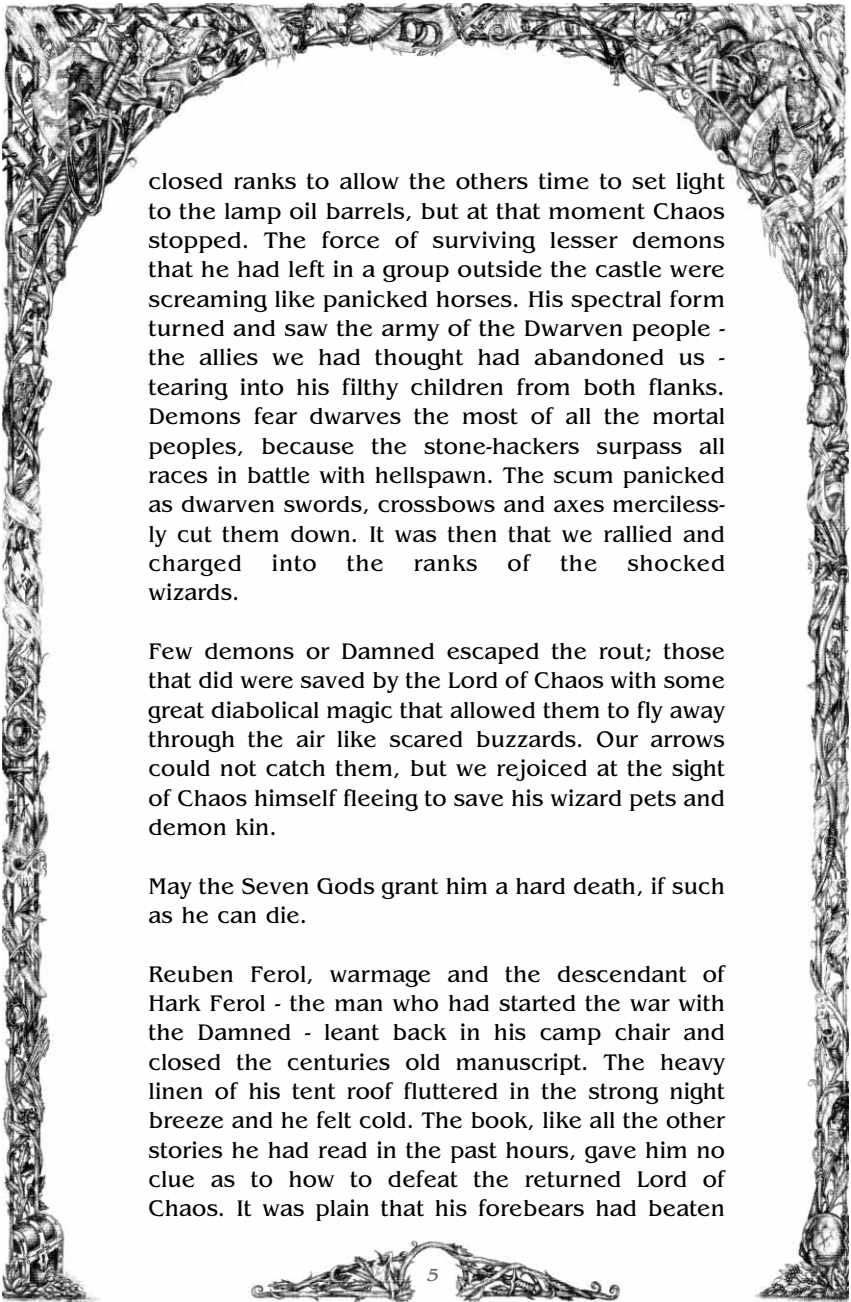
one area, we would reoccupy another. Powerful as they were, the Damned - as we named the wizards - were relatively few in number and could receive no further reinforcements.

We could not win though. An insubstantial horror like the Lord of Chaos could not be faced in battle and could not be killed by stealth. Wherever his ghostly apparition appeared in the battle we would flee away at once, but he always directed his minions to our escape routes and hiding places. Little by little, inch-by-inch, we were being beaten.

After the fourth month of the war we had to abandon Rivertown. The mothers and children had long since taken to the forests and we surviving fighters withdrew to Stormfist Castle. We knew we were finished, but the longer we held out, the longer our families had to escape to the lands of our allies. We had plenty of food and war supplies in Stormfist, but a castle's main strength is its gatehouse: if it falls, the rest of the fortifications are all but useless. We knew that the wizards of the Damned, aided by the Lord of Chaos, could blast down the gate with their powerful war magics, so we grimly prepared for death. We prayed to the Seven Good Gods and placed barrels of lamp oil around the walls. The bastard Damned would win nothing but smoldering rubble when we were dead.

As we had guessed, the Damned broke the gatehouse like a walnut and the spect-like Lord of Chaos drifted over the rubble, laughing hideously, with his foul mages dancing at his heels. Those of us left to hold him back raised our weapons and





closed ranks to allow the others time to set light to the lamp oil barrels, but at that moment Chaos stopped. The force of surviving lesser demons that he had left in a group outside the castle were screaming like panicked horses. His spectral form turned and saw the army of the Dwarven people - the allies we had thought had abandoned us - tearing into his filthy children from both flanks. Demons fear dwarves the most of all the mortal peoples, because the stone-hackers surpass all races in battle with hellspawn. The scum panicked as dwarven swords, crossbows and axes mercilessly cut them down. It was then that we rallied and charged into the ranks of the shocked wizards.

Few demons or Damned escaped the rout; those that did were saved by the Lord of Chaos with some great diabolical magic that allowed them to fly away through the air like scared buzzards. Our arrows could not catch them, but we rejoiced at the sight of Chaos himself fleeing to save his wizard pets and demon kin.

May the Seven Gods grant him a hard death, if such as he can die.

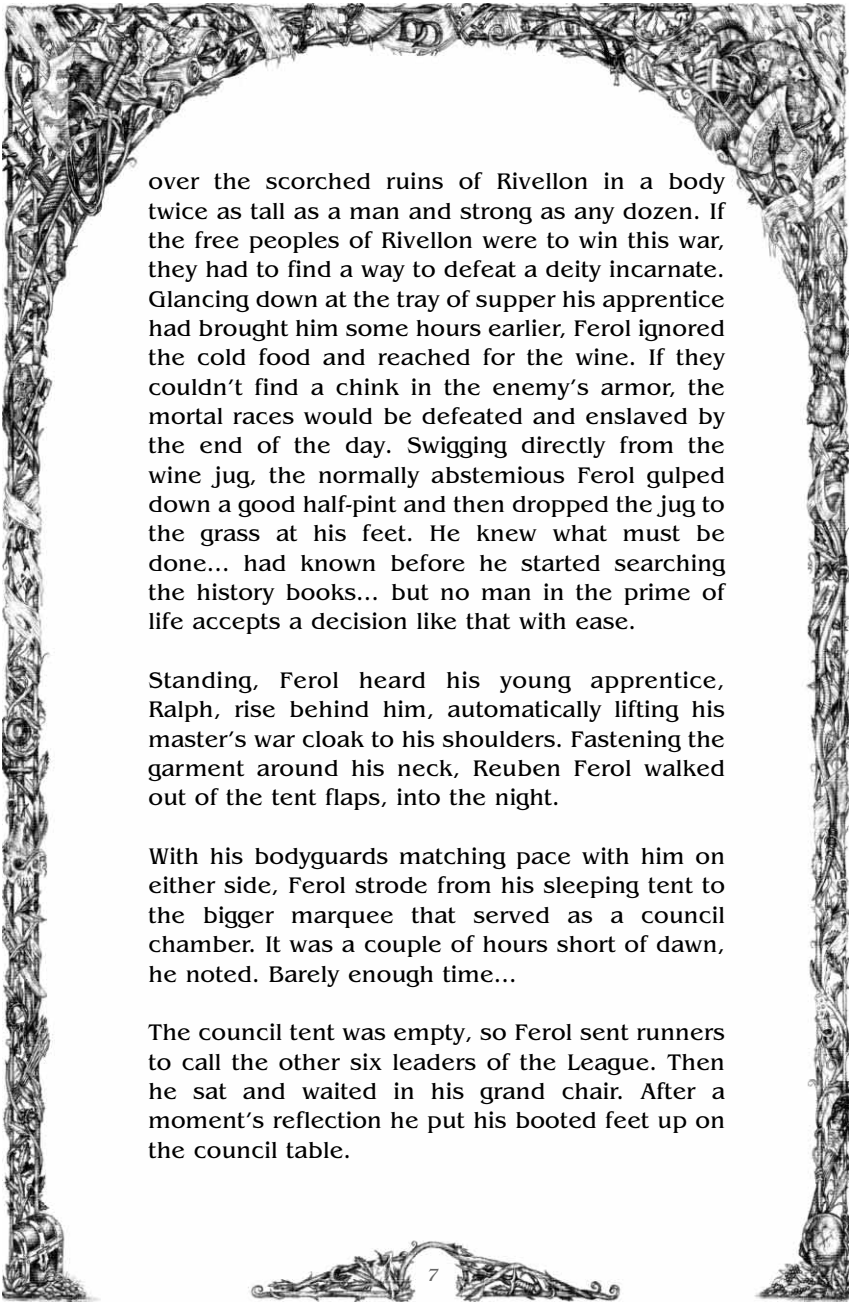
Reuben Ferol, warmage and the descendant of Hark Ferol - the man who had started the war with the Damned - leant back in his camp chair and closed the centuries old manuscript. The heavy linen of his tent roof fluttered in the strong night breeze and he felt cold. The book, like all the other stories he had read in the past hours, gave him no clue as to how to defeat the returned Lord of Chaos. It was plain that his forebears had beaten



the demon with a mixture of hit-and-run tactics and simple good luck. All sources flatly stated that a pitched battle with the Damned and their demon allies was futile and suicidal, but such a battle was what he and the armies of the League were going to have to face in the morning.

After long isolation in their mountain fastness, the Damned had re-emerged with a much larger army. The Damned looked unnaturally young - none over thirty - which served to confirm the rumor that the Lord of Chaos offered eternal youth to his depraved followers.

To make matters worse, the Damned were now well led. In the previous conflict they had plainly made serious tactical blunders - such as marching into an untamed town as if they owned it - but now they had a competent leader: an archmage called Ulthring. Finally, and worst of all, the Lord of Chaos had somehow won himself a physical form. In the last war he had been a ghostly entity - horrible, but largely powerless. Now he stalked

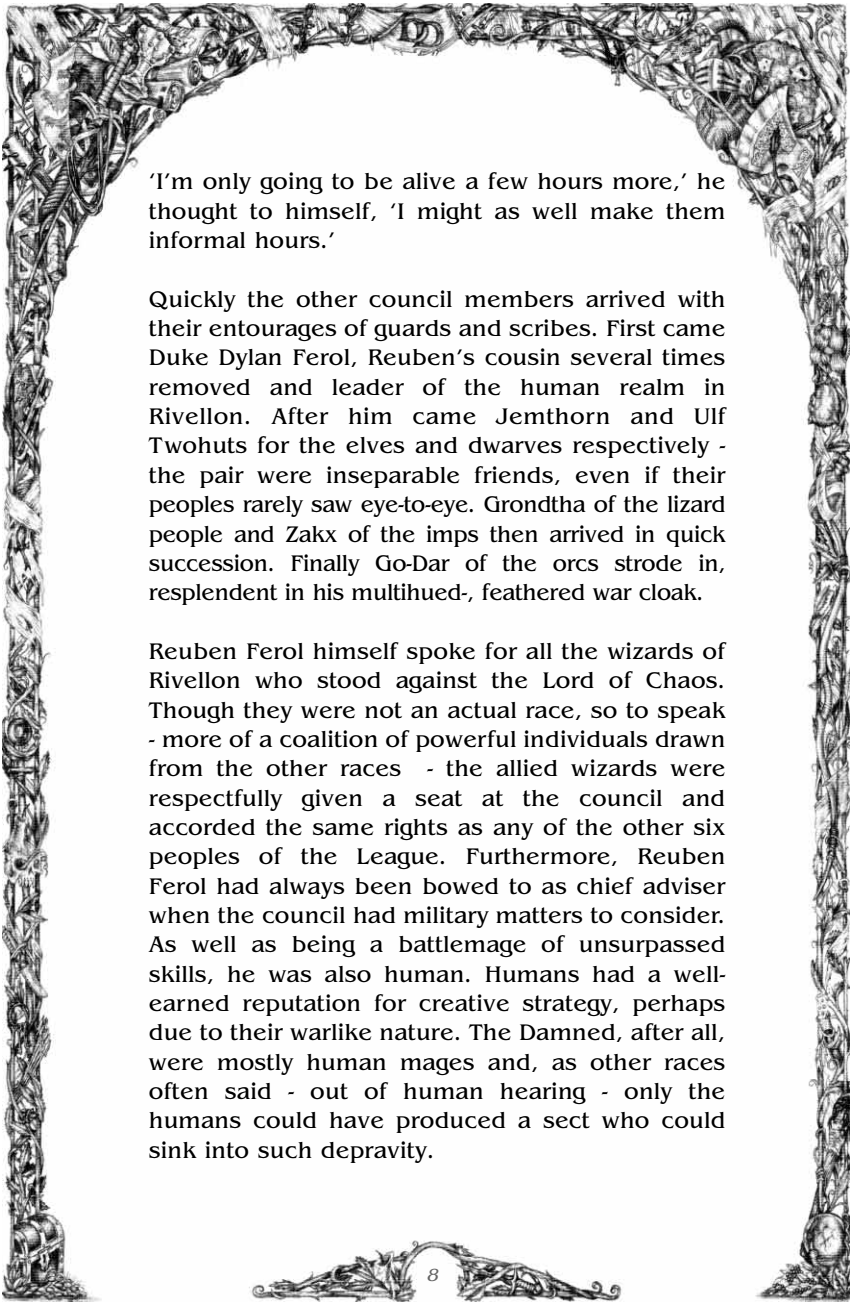


over the scorched ruins of Rivellon in a body twice as tall as a man and strong as any dozen. If the free peoples of Rivellon were to win this war, they had to find a way to defeat a deity incarnate. Glancing down at the tray of supper his apprentice had brought him some hours earlier, Ferol ignored the cold food and reached for the wine. If they couldn't find a chink in the enemy's armor, the mortal races would be defeated and enslaved by the end of the day. Swigging directly from the wine jug, the normally abstemious Ferol gulped down a good half-pint and then dropped the jug to the grass at his feet. He knew what must be done... had known before he started searching the history books... but no man in the prime of life accepts a decision like that with ease.

Standing, Ferol heard his young apprentice, Ralph, rise behind him, automatically lifting his master's war cloak to his shoulders. Fastening the garment around his neck, Reuben Ferol walked out of the tent flaps, into the night.

With his bodyguards matching pace with him on either side, Ferol strode from his sleeping tent to the bigger marquee that served as a council chamber. It was a couple of hours short of dawn, he noted. Barely enough time...

The council tent was empty, so Ferol sent runners to call the other six leaders of the League. Then he sat and waited in his grand chair. After a moment's reflection he put his booted feet up on the council table.



'I'm only going to be alive a few hours more,' he thought to himself, 'I might as well make them informal hours.'

Quickly the other council members arrived with their entourages of guards and scribes. First came Duke Dylan Ferol, Reuben's cousin several times removed and leader of the human realm in Rivellon. After him came Jemthorn and Ulf Twohuts for the elves and dwarves respectively - the pair were inseparable friends, even if their peoples rarely saw eye-to-eye. Grondtha of the lizard people and Zakx of the imps then arrived in quick succession. Finally Go-Dar of the orcs strode in, resplendent in his multihued-, feathered war cloak.

Reuben Ferol himself spoke for all the wizards of Rivellon who stood against the Lord of Chaos. Though they were not an actual race, so to speak - more of a coalition of powerful individuals drawn from the other races - the allied wizards were respectfully given a seat at the council and accorded the same rights as any of the other six peoples of the League. Furthermore, Reuben Ferol had always been bowed to as chief adviser when the council had military matters to consider. As well as being a battlemage of unsurpassed skills, he was also human. Humans had a well-earned reputation for creative strategy, perhaps due to their warlike nature. The Damned, after all, were mostly human mages and, as other races often said - out of human hearing - only the humans could have produced a sect who could sink into such depravity.

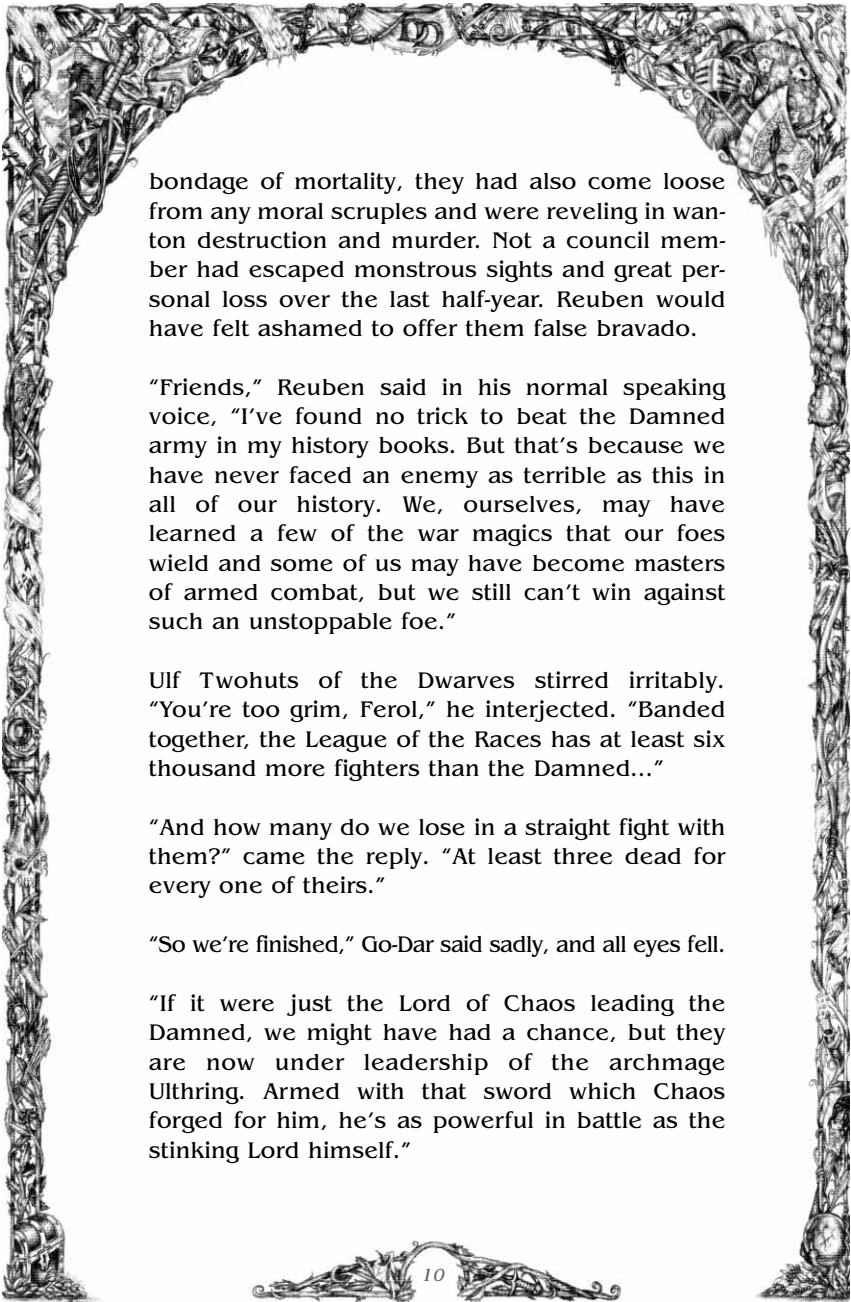


Ferol stood with all eyes upon him. He briefly considered launching into the sort of oratory generals are supposed to hearten their fellows with before a hard and futile battle, but he quickly rejected the thought. He was too tired and so were they.

The last six months of savage fighting had burned all romanticism from the leaders of the League of Seven. Even Go-Dar of the orcs - a renowned comic poet (although a little saccharine for Ferol's tastes) - was sullen and despondent.

The warnings of the Damned's savagery in the last war had proved all too understated when their descendants had fallen on Rivellon. At that time they had been restricted in numbers and had allowed themselves be drawn into street fighting. Now they numbered in the thousands, and were supported by many hundreds of demons.

The Damned had ravaged the land with an unbelievable bloodlust. It was as if, freed from the



bondage of mortality, they had also come loose from any moral scruples and were reveling in wanton destruction and murder. Not a council member had escaped monstrous sights and great personal loss over the last half-year. Reuben would have felt ashamed to offer them false bravado.

"Friends," Reuben said in his normal speaking voice, "I've found no trick to beat the Damned army in my history books. But that's because we have never faced an enemy as terrible as this in all of our history. We, ourselves, may have learned a few of the war magics that our foes wield and some of us may have become masters of armed combat, but we still can't win against such an unstoppable foe."

Ulf Twohuts of the Dwarves stirred irritably. "You're too grim, Ferol," he interjected. "Banded together, the League of the Races has at least six thousand more fighters than the Damned..."

"And how many do we lose in a straight fight with them?" came the reply. "At least three dead for every one of theirs."

"So we're finished," Go-Dar said sadly, and all eyes fell.

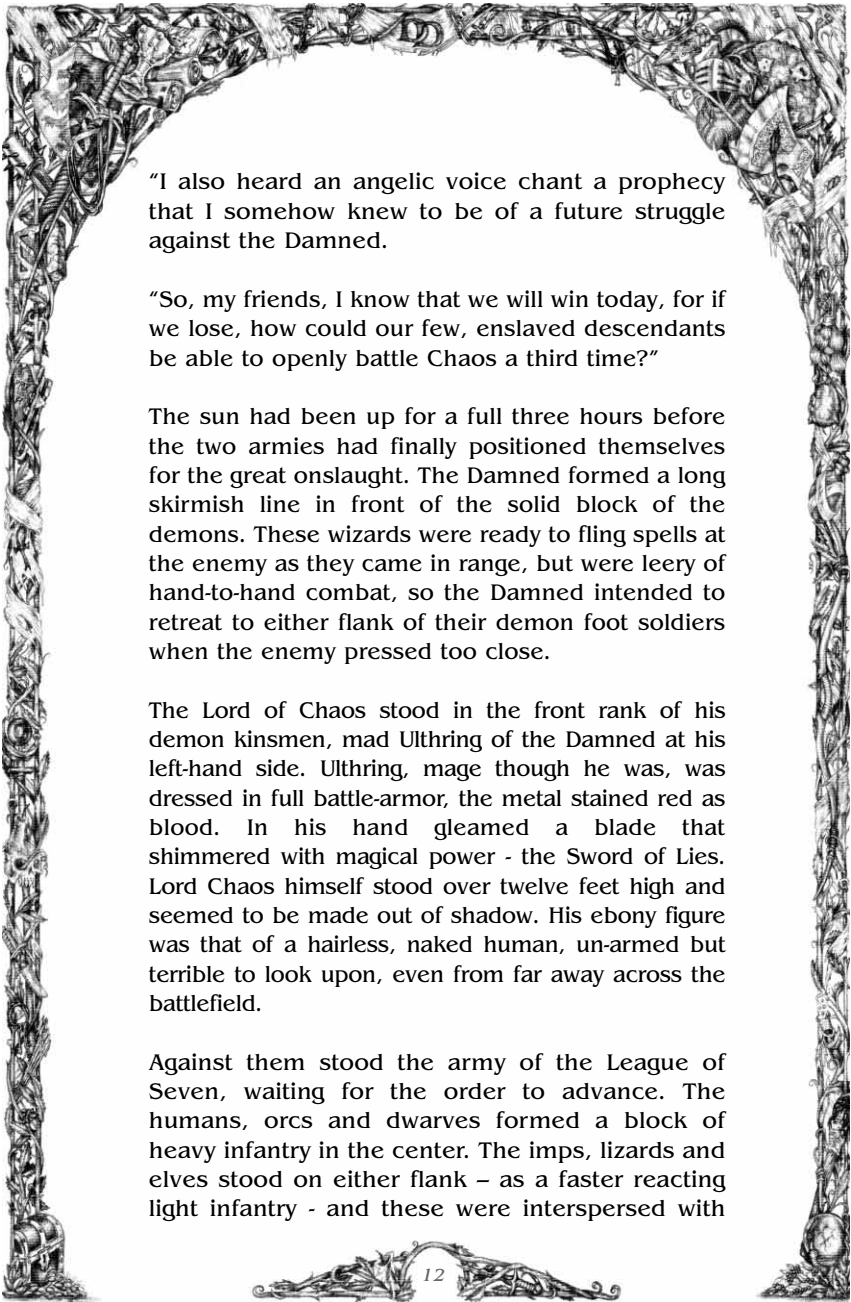
"If it were just the Lord of Chaos leading the Damned, we might have had a chance, but they are now under leadership of the archmage Ulthring. Armed with that sword which Chaos forged for him, he's as powerful in battle as the stinking Lord himself."

Ferol paused to let this sink in, then smiled grimly. "Still, there's no reason to let that spoil our morning..." His smile broadened at their shocked faces, then Jemthorn of the elves smiled too. "You've thought of a plan, haven't you, you old fox," he said almost laughing.

"A plan, yes," Ferol agreed, "but it's not mine. It came to me in a dream three nights ago, so I presume some divinity is responsible. And like all gifts from the gods, it has its price."

Ferol sat down again and rested his elbows on the table and his chin on his fists. His eyes lost focus as he recalled the dream. "I saw the hordes of the Damned breaking in panic and our own army pursuing them across yonder landscape, even though I would not see that field before yesterday evening." "My dream showed Chaos and Ulthring defeated and panic spreading throughout the ranks of the Damned. I saw how it was done... and I saw the price of the victory." Ferol looked around at them.





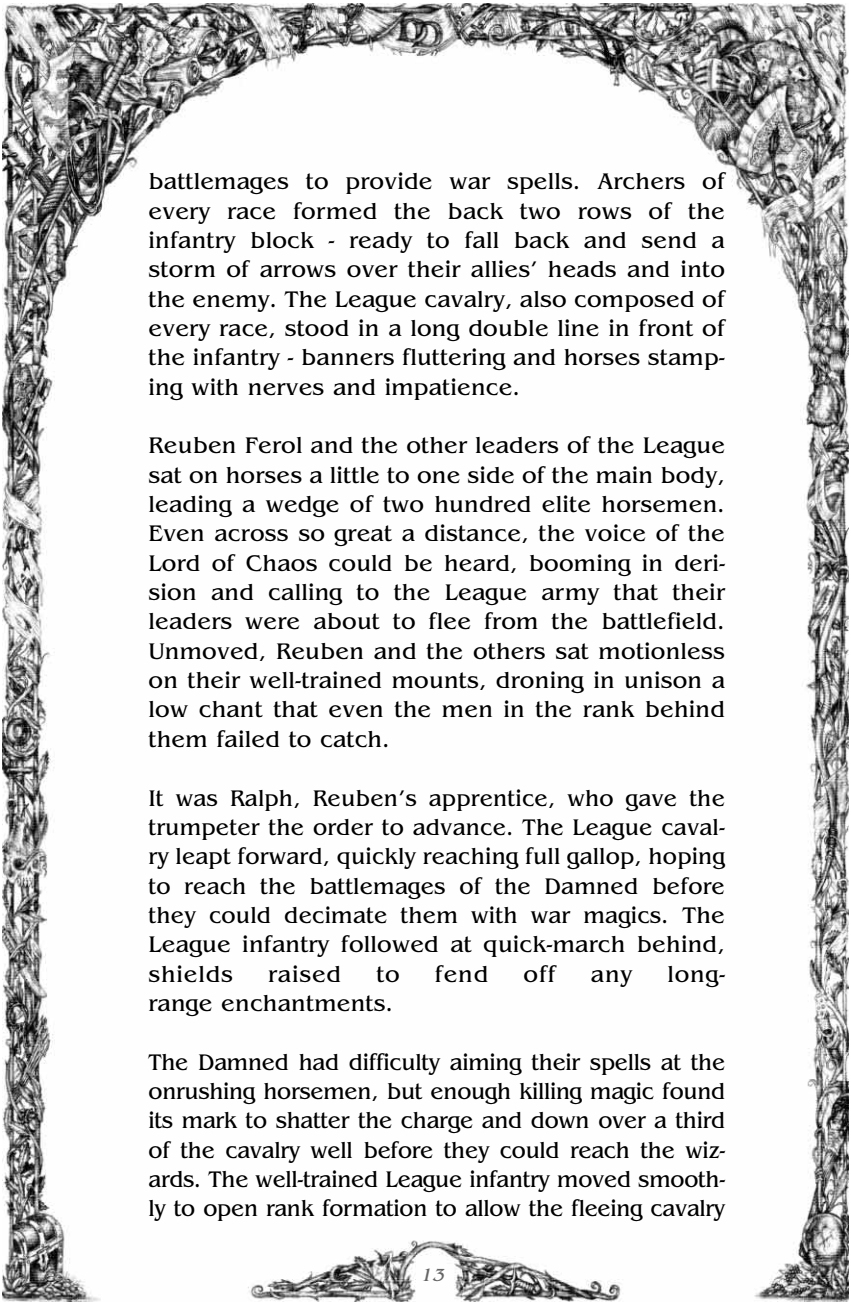
"I also heard an angelic voice chant a prophecy that I somehow knew to be of a future struggle against the Damned.

"So, my friends, I know that we will win today, for if we lose, how could our few, enslaved descendants be able to openly battle Chaos a third time?"

The sun had been up for a full three hours before the two armies had finally positioned themselves for the great onslaught. The Damned formed a long skirmish line in front of the solid block of the demons. These wizards were ready to fling spells at the enemy as they came in range, but were leery of hand-to-hand combat, so the Damned intended to retreat to either flank of their demon foot soldiers when the enemy pressed too close.

The Lord of Chaos stood in the front rank of his demon kinsmen, mad Ulthring of the Damned at his left-hand side. Ulthring, mage though he was, was dressed in full battle-armor, the metal stained red as blood. In his hand gleamed a blade that shimmered with magical power - the Sword of Lies. Lord Chaos himself stood over twelve feet high and seemed to be made out of shadow. His ebony figure was that of a hairless, naked human, un-armed but terrible to look upon, even from far away across the battlefield.

Against them stood the army of the League of Seven, waiting for the order to advance. The humans, orcs and dwarves formed a block of heavy infantry in the center. The imps, lizards and elves stood on either flank - as a faster reacting light infantry - and these were interspersed with

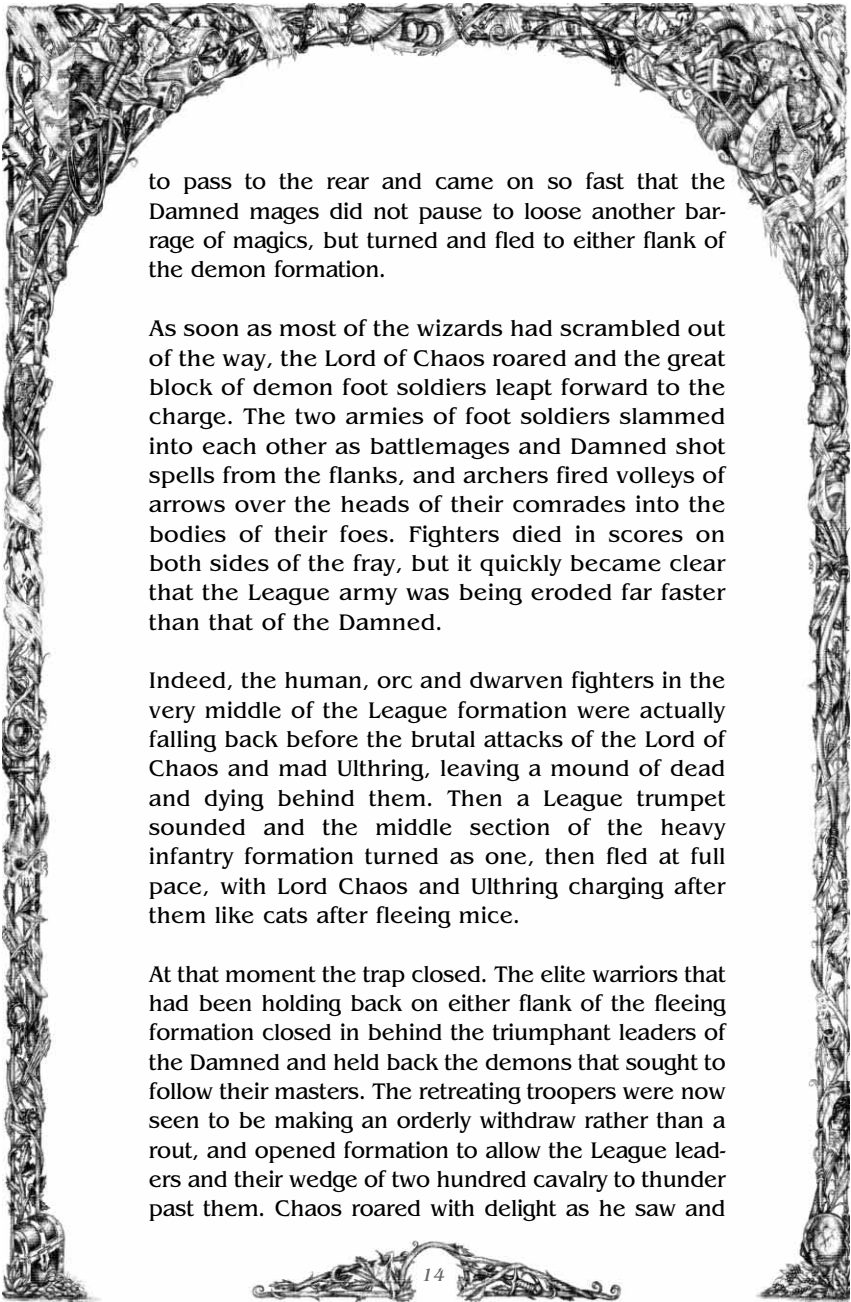


battlemages to provide war spells. Archers of every race formed the back two rows of the infantry block - ready to fall back and send a storm of arrows over their allies' heads and into the enemy. The League cavalry, also composed of every race, stood in a long double line in front of the infantry - banners fluttering and horses stamping with nerves and impatience.

Reuben Ferol and the other leaders of the League sat on horses a little to one side of the main body, leading a wedge of two hundred elite horsemen. Even across so great a distance, the voice of the Lord of Chaos could be heard, booming in derision and calling to the League army that their leaders were about to flee from the battlefield. Unmoved, Reuben and the others sat motionless on their well-trained mounts, droning in unison a low chant that even the men in the rank behind them failed to catch.

It was Ralph, Reuben's apprentice, who gave the trumpeter the order to advance. The League cavalry leapt forward, quickly reaching full gallop, hoping to reach the battlemages of the Damned before they could decimate them with war magics. The League infantry followed at quick-march behind, shields raised to fend off any long-range enchantments.

The Damned had difficulty aiming their spells at the onrushing horsemen, but enough killing magic found its mark to shatter the charge and down over a third of the cavalry well before they could reach the wizards. The well-trained League infantry moved smoothly to open rank formation to allow the fleeing cavalry

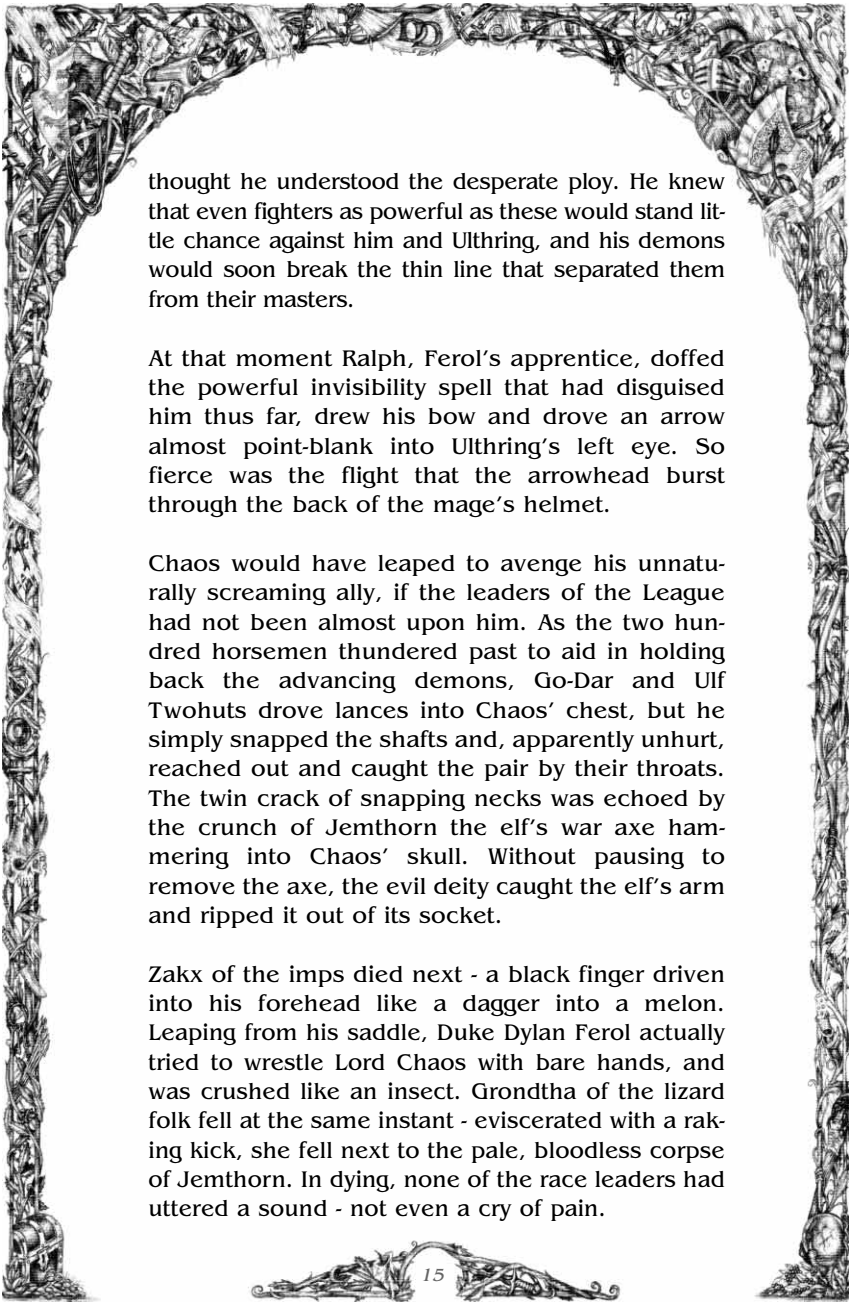


to pass to the rear and came on so fast that the Damned mages did not pause to loose another barrage of magics, but turned and fled to either flank of the demon formation.

As soon as most of the wizards had scrambled out of the way, the Lord of Chaos roared and the great block of demon foot soldiers leapt forward to the charge. The two armies of foot soldiers slammed into each other as battlemages and Damned shot spells from the flanks, and archers fired volleys of arrows over the heads of their comrades into the bodies of their foes. Fighters died in scores on both sides of the fray, but it quickly became clear that the League army was being eroded far faster than that of the Damned.

Indeed, the human, orc and dwarven fighters in the very middle of the League formation were actually falling back before the brutal attacks of the Lord of Chaos and mad Ulthring, leaving a mound of dead and dying behind them. Then a League trumpet sounded and the middle section of the heavy infantry formation turned as one, then fled at full pace, with Lord Chaos and Ulthring charging after them like cats after fleeing mice.

At that moment the trap closed. The elite warriors that had been holding back on either flank of the fleeing formation closed in behind the triumphant leaders of the Damned and held back the demons that sought to follow their masters. The retreating troopers were now seen to be making an orderly withdraw rather than a rout, and opened formation to allow the League leaders and their wedge of two hundred cavalry to thunder past them. Chaos roared with delight as he saw and



thought he understood the desperate ploy. He knew that even fighters as powerful as these would stand little chance against him and Ulthring, and his demons would soon break the thin line that separated them from their masters.

At that moment Ralph, Ferol's apprentice, doffed the powerful invisibility spell that had disguised him thus far, drew his bow and drove an arrow almost point-blank into Ulthring's left eye. So fierce was the flight that the arrowhead burst through the back of the mage's helmet.

Chaos would have leaped to avenge his unnaturally screaming ally, if the leaders of the League had not been almost upon him. As the two hundred horsemen thundered past to aid in holding back the advancing demons, Go-Dar and Ulf Twohuts drove lances into Chaos' chest, but he simply snapped the shafts and, apparently unhurt, reached out and caught the pair by their throats. The twin crack of snapping necks was echoed by the crunch of Jemthorn the elf's war axe hammering into Chaos' skull. Without pausing to remove the axe, the evil deity caught the elf's arm and ripped it out of its socket.

Zakx of the imps died next - a black finger driven into his forehead like a dagger into a melon. Leaping from his saddle, Duke Dylan Ferol actually tried to wrestle Lord Chaos with bare hands, and was crushed like an insect. Grondtha of the lizard folk fell at the same instant - eviscerated with a raking kick, she fell next to the pale, bloodless corpse of Jemthorn. In dying, none of the race leaders had uttered a sound - not even a cry of pain.

At last only Reuben Ferol remained. The demon king pulled Jemthorn's axe from his head and adopted a defensive stance. Then, unexpectedly, Ferol simply dropped his guard and swung down off his skittering horse. As he strode towards Chaos, the battlemage began to laugh: a long derisive laugh that was the last thing he ever did. The Lord of Chaos struck his open hand into the human's chest then withdrew it, letting the body slump to the ground.



But as Ferol's blood splashed the earth to join that of his six friends, a ball of light erupted from the ground, engulfing the Lord of Chaos and those demons of his bodyguard that had only just fought their way to him. The sacrificial spell that the League leaders had wrought tore Chaos up into the air and, screaming with rage and pain, twisted him through four dimensions and catapulted him back to Hell with the sound of a thunderclap.

A little farther off, Ralph stood over the writhing body of Ulthring - still insanely and impossibly alive. Holding Ulthring's Sword of Lies, the apprentice stepped closer and drove its point through the mage's neck. As Ulthring finally died, Ralph held the cursed sword aloft. Ahead of him the Damned and their pet demons had broken into panicked flight at the loss of both their leaders, and were being cut down by the victorious wizards, imps, elves, dwarves, lizards, orcs and humans of the army of the League of Seven Races.

In the League army's encampment, the camp followers cheered at the sight of the Damned in full flight, and every able-bodied fighter hurried out to join the ruthless killing on the green sward. In Reuben Ferol's tent, a parchment lay on his reading desk. Knowing that death was upon him he had left neither a last testament, nor a final message to his followers. He had simply left the riddling words he had heard in a dream, three days before his sacrifice.

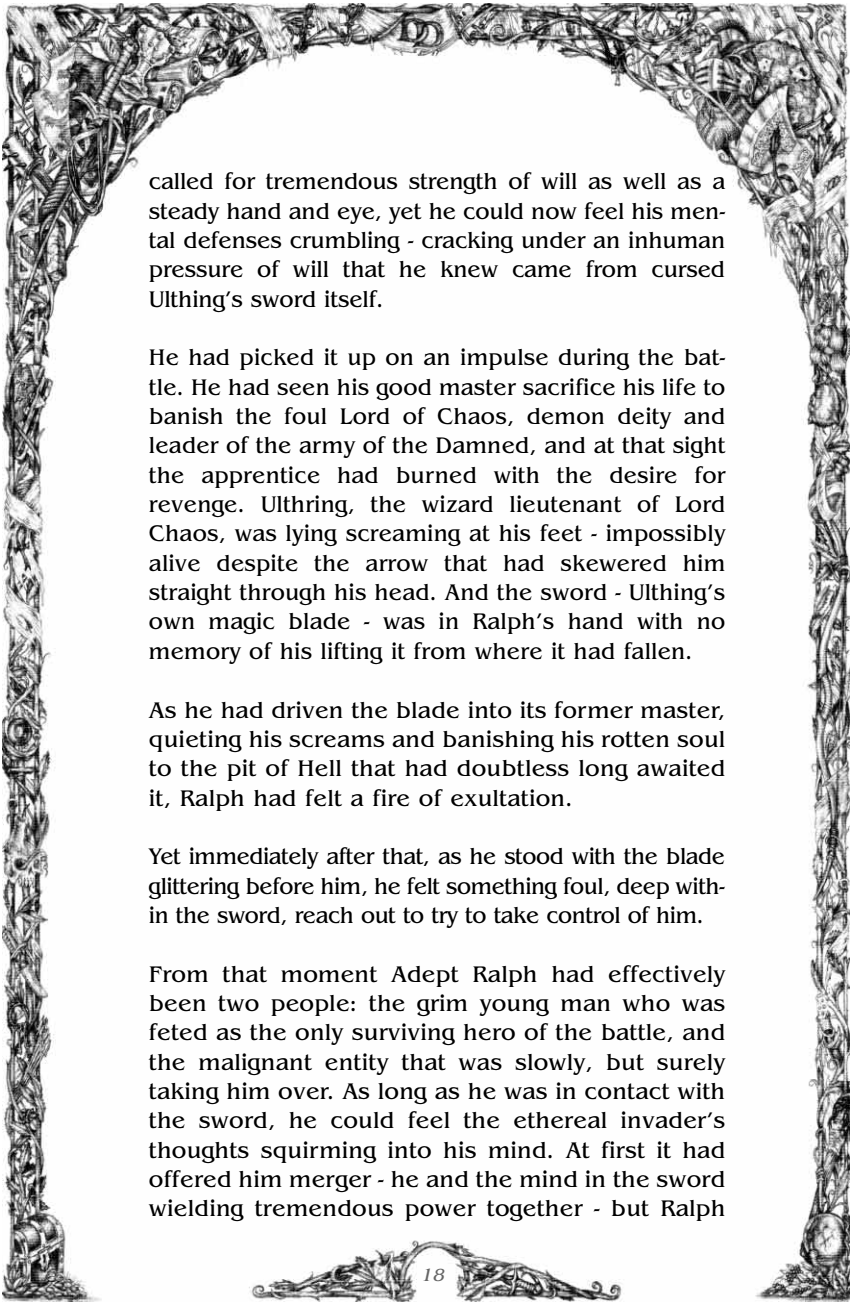


Chapter 2

Adept Ralph, apprentice to Reuben Ferol and now - following his master's death in battle - the chief battlemage of Rai'alor and designated spokesman for all the wizards in Rivellon, was going mad.

He had played his part in the Battle of the Damned: driving a yew arrow through the eye of Archmage Ulthing and then dispatching the bastard with his own sword. But it was there, at the very moment of triumph, that he had felt his psyche being undermined.

Although still a youth, Ralph was considered one of the most gifted battlemages in the land, a skill that



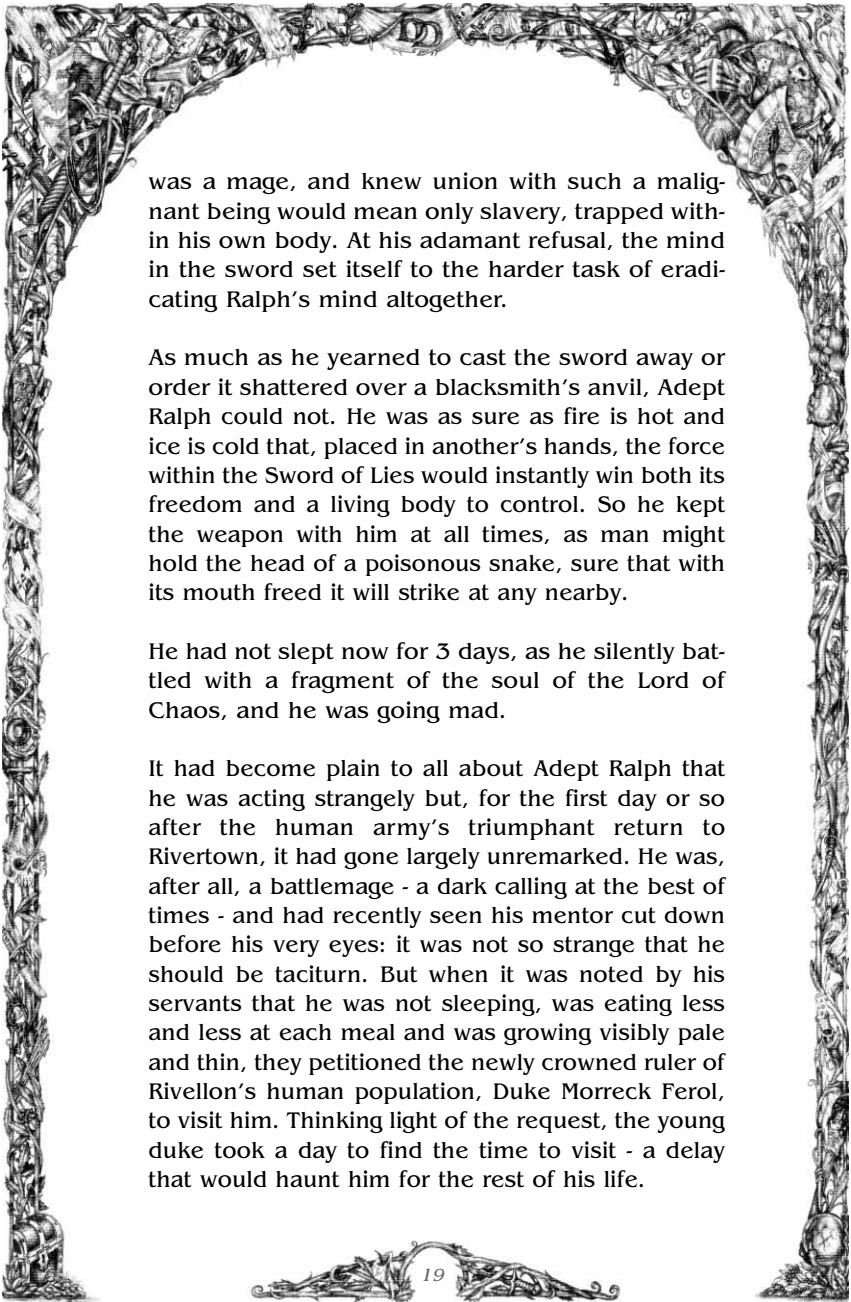
called for tremendous strength of will as well as a steady hand and eye, yet he could now feel his mental defenses crumbling - cracking under an inhuman pressure of will that he knew came from cursed Ulthing's sword itself.

He had picked it up on an impulse during the battle. He had seen his good master sacrifice his life to banish the foul Lord of Chaos, demon deity and leader of the army of the Damned, and at that sight the apprentice had burned with the desire for revenge. Ulthing, the wizard lieutenant of Lord Chaos, was lying screaming at his feet - impossibly alive despite the arrow that had skewered him straight through his head. And the sword - Ulthing's own magic blade - was in Ralph's hand with no memory of his lifting it from where it had fallen.

As he had driven the blade into its former master, quieting his screams and banishing his rotten soul to the pit of Hell that had doubtless long awaited it, Ralph had felt a fire of exultation.

Yet immediately after that, as he stood with the blade glittering before him, he felt something foul, deep within the sword, reach out to try to take control of him.

From that moment Adept Ralph had effectively been two people: the grim young man who was fated as the only surviving hero of the battle, and the malignant entity that was slowly, but surely taking him over. As long as he was in contact with the sword, he could feel the ethereal invader's thoughts squirming into his mind. At first it had offered him merger - he and the mind in the sword wielding tremendous power together - but Ralph

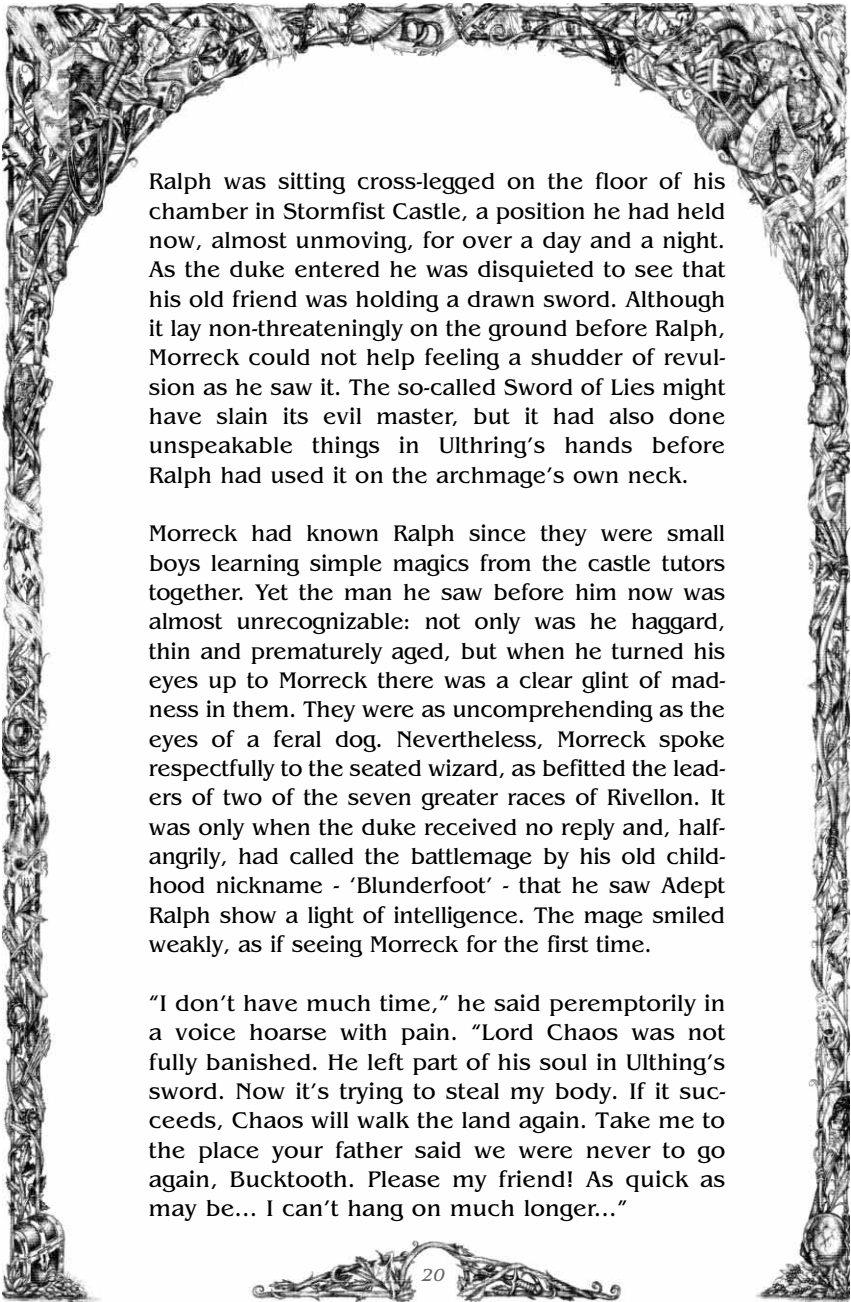


was a mage, and knew union with such a malignant being would mean only slavery, trapped within his own body. At his adamant refusal, the mind in the sword set itself to the harder task of eradicating Ralph's mind altogether.

As much as he yearned to cast the sword away or order it shattered over a blacksmith's anvil, Adept Ralph could not. He was as sure as fire is hot and ice is cold that, placed in another's hands, the force within the Sword of Lies would instantly win both its freedom and a living body to control. So he kept the weapon with him at all times, as man might hold the head of a poisonous snake, sure that with its mouth freed it will strike at any nearby.

He had not slept now for 3 days, as he silently battled with a fragment of the soul of the Lord of Chaos, and he was going mad.

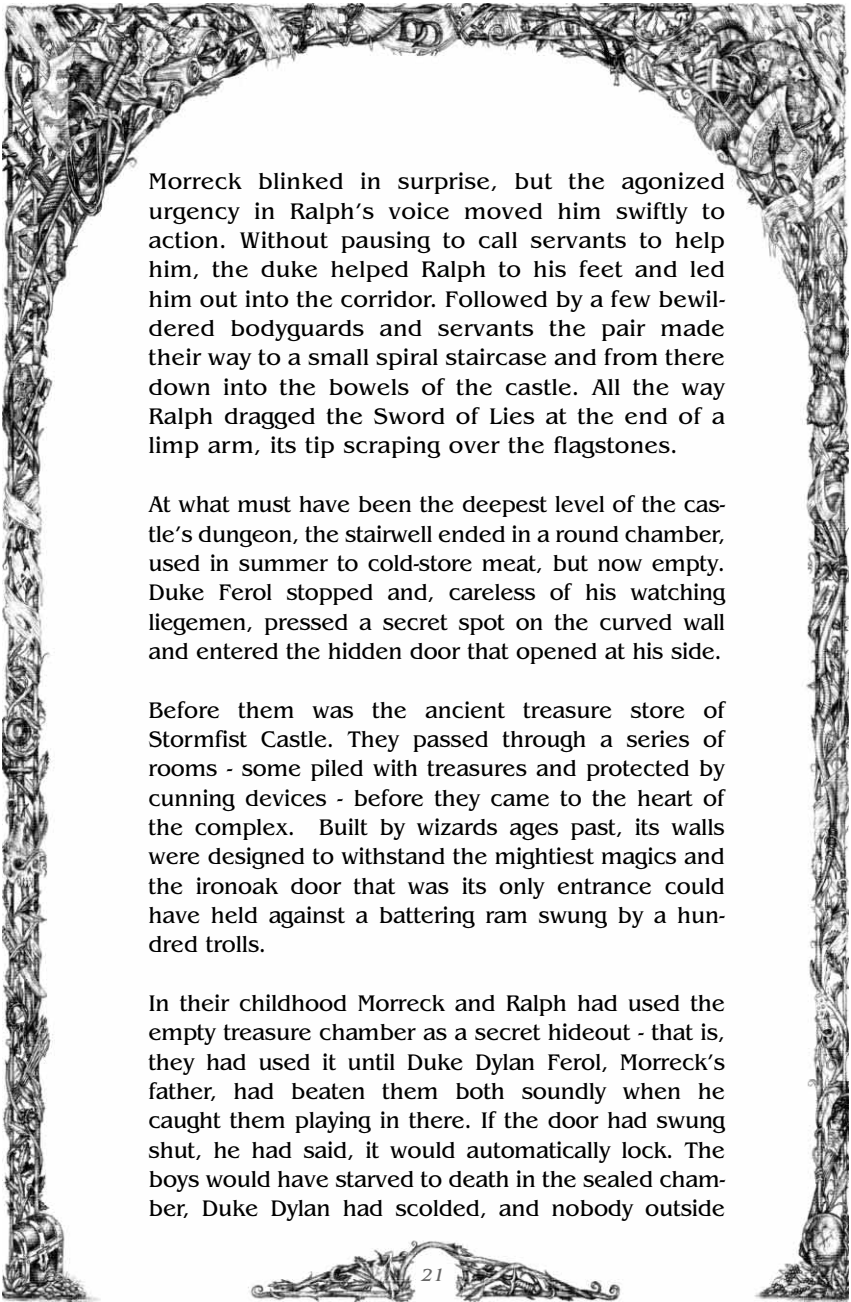
It had become plain to all about Adept Ralph that he was acting strangely but, for the first day or so after the human army's triumphant return to Rivertown, it had gone largely unremarked. He was, after all, a battlemage - a dark calling at the best of times - and had recently seen his mentor cut down before his very eyes: it was not so strange that he should be taciturn. But when it was noted by his servants that he was not sleeping, was eating less and less at each meal and was growing visibly pale and thin, they petitioned the newly crowned ruler of Rivellon's human population, Duke Morreck Ferol, to visit him. Thinking light of the request, the young duke took a day to find the time to visit - a delay that would haunt him for the rest of his life.



Ralph was sitting cross-legged on the floor of his chamber in Stormfist Castle, a position he had held now, almost unmoving, for over a day and a night. As the duke entered he was disquieted to see that his old friend was holding a drawn sword. Although it lay non-threateningly on the ground before Ralph, Morreck could not help feeling a shudder of revulsion as he saw it. The so-called Sword of Lies might have slain its evil master, but it had also done unspeakable things in Ulthring's hands before Ralph had used it on the archmage's own neck.

Morreck had known Ralph since they were small boys learning simple magics from the castle tutors together. Yet the man he saw before him now was almost unrecognizable: not only was he haggard, thin and prematurely aged, but when he turned his eyes up to Morreck there was a clear glint of madness in them. They were as uncomprehending as the eyes of a feral dog. Nevertheless, Morreck spoke respectfully to the seated wizard, as befitted the leaders of two of the seven greater races of Rivellon. It was only when the duke received no reply and, half-angrily, had called the battlemage by his old childhood nickname - 'Blunderfoot' - that he saw Adept Ralph show a light of intelligence. The mage smiled weakly, as if seeing Morreck for the first time.

"I don't have much time," he said peremptorily in a voice hoarse with pain. "Lord Chaos was not fully banished. He left part of his soul in Ulthing's sword. Now it's trying to steal my body. If it succeeds, Chaos will walk the land again. Take me to the place your father said we were never to go again, Bucktooth. Please my friend! As quick as may be... I can't hang on much longer..."

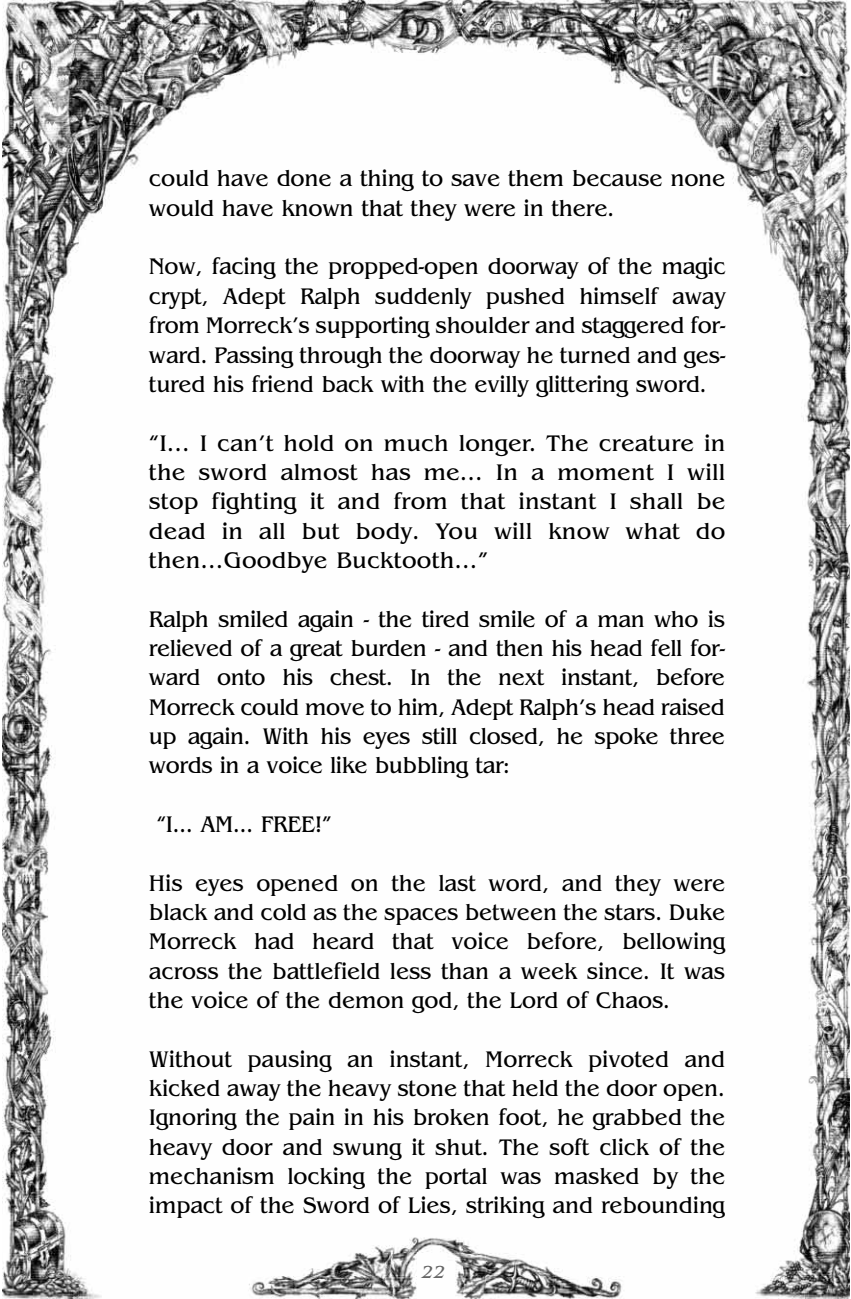


Morreck blinked in surprise, but the agonized urgency in Ralph's voice moved him swiftly to action. Without pausing to call servants to help him, the duke helped Ralph to his feet and led him out into the corridor. Followed by a few bewildered bodyguards and servants the pair made their way to a small spiral staircase and from there down into the bowels of the castle. All the way Ralph dragged the Sword of Lies at the end of a limp arm, its tip scraping over the flagstones.

At what must have been the deepest level of the castle's dungeon, the stairwell ended in a round chamber, used in summer to cold-store meat, but now empty. Duke Ferol stopped and, careless of his watching liegemen, pressed a secret spot on the curved wall and entered the hidden door that opened at his side.

Before them was the ancient treasure store of Stormfist Castle. They passed through a series of rooms - some piled with treasures and protected by cunning devices - before they came to the heart of the complex. Built by wizards ages past, its walls were designed to withstand the mightiest magics and the ironoak door that was its only entrance could have held against a battering ram swung by a hundred trolls.

In their childhood Morreck and Ralph had used the empty treasure chamber as a secret hideout - that is, they had used it until Duke Dylan Ferol, Morreck's father, had beaten them both soundly when he caught them playing in there. If the door had swung shut, he had said, it would automatically lock. The boys would have starved to death in the sealed chamber, Duke Dylan had scolded, and nobody outside



could have done a thing to save them because none would have known that they were in there.

Now, facing the propped-open doorway of the magic crypt, Adept Ralph suddenly pushed himself away from Morreck's supporting shoulder and staggered forward. Passing through the doorway he turned and gestured his friend back with the evilly glittering sword.

"I... I can't hold on much longer. The creature in the sword almost has me... In a moment I will stop fighting it and from that instant I shall be dead in all but body. You will know what do then...Goodbye Bucktooth..."

Ralph smiled again - the tired smile of a man who is relieved of a great burden - and then his head fell forward onto his chest. In the next instant, before Morreck could move to him, Adept Ralph's head raised up again. With his eyes still closed, he spoke three words in a voice like bubbling tar:

"I... AM... FREE!"

His eyes opened on the last word, and they were black and cold as the spaces between the stars. Duke Morreck had heard that voice before, bellowing across the battlefield less than a week since. It was the voice of the demon god, the Lord of Chaos.

Without pausing an instant, Morreck pivoted and kicked away the heavy stone that held the door open. Ignoring the pain in his broken foot, he grabbed the heavy door and swung it shut. The soft click of the mechanism locking the portal was masked by the impact of the Sword of Lies, striking and rebounding

from the impervious wood on the inside of the door. Morreck smiled grimly as a terrible roar seemed to shake the very rock around them.

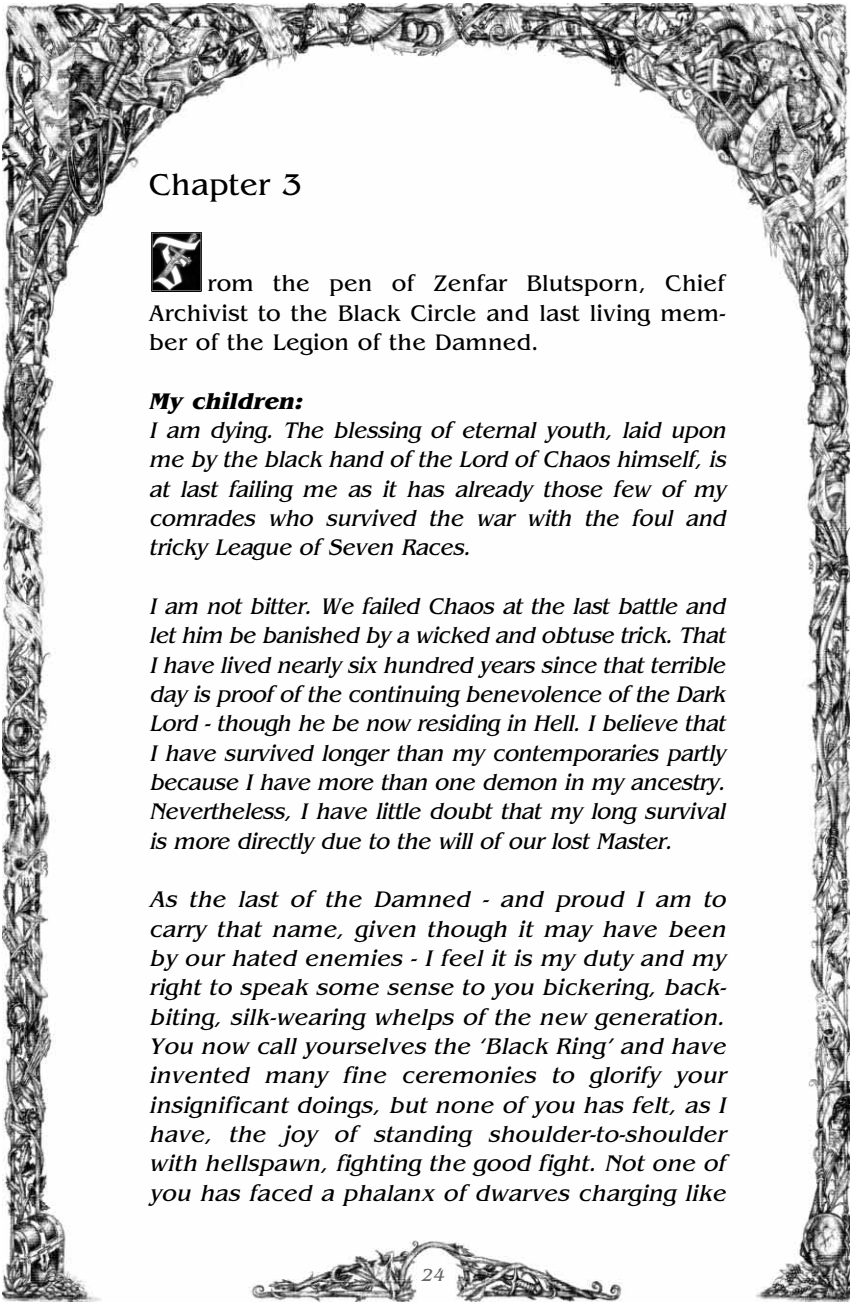
"Aye, squeal all you like demon," he snarled under his breath, "but you can't get out, and that body you've stolen won't live long on just air. After that, you can lurk in that damned sword 'til the stars fall and the land breaks open."

He turned painfully away and raised his eyes to the ceiling.

"Farewell, old Blunderfoot. I might have known you'd save the world single-handedly before you were done. Farewell."

With that, he let his bodyguards help him limp away from the door to the chamber that imprisoned a god.





Chapter 3



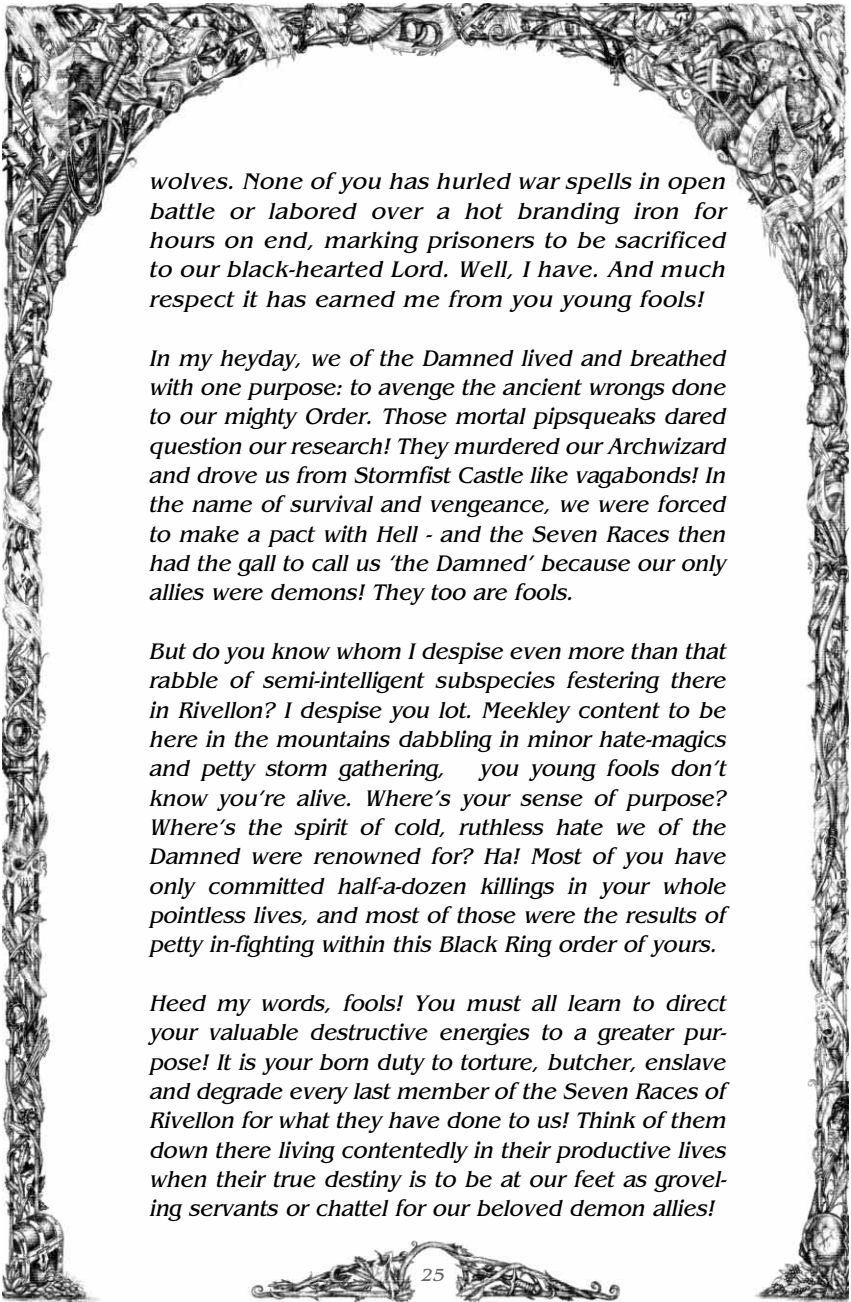
From the pen of Zenfar Blutsporn, Chief Archivist to the Black Circle and last living member of the Legion of the Damned.

My children:

I am dying. The blessing of eternal youth, laid upon me by the black hand of the Lord of Chaos himself, is at last failing me as it has already those few of my comrades who survived the war with the foul and tricky League of Seven Races.

I am not bitter. We failed Chaos at the last battle and let him be banished by a wicked and obtuse trick. That I have lived nearly six hundred years since that terrible day is proof of the continuing benevolence of the Dark Lord - though he be now residing in Hell. I believe that I have survived longer than my contemporaries partly because I have more than one demon in my ancestry. Nevertheless, I have little doubt that my long survival is more directly due to the will of our lost Master.

As the last of the Damned - and proud I am to carry that name, given though it may have been by our hated enemies - I feel it is my duty and my right to speak some sense to you bickering, back-biting, silk-wearing whelps of the new generation. You now call yourselves the 'Black Ring' and have invented many fine ceremonies to glorify your insignificant doings, but none of you has felt, as I have, the joy of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with hellspawn, fighting the good fight. Not one of you has faced a phalanx of dwarves charging like

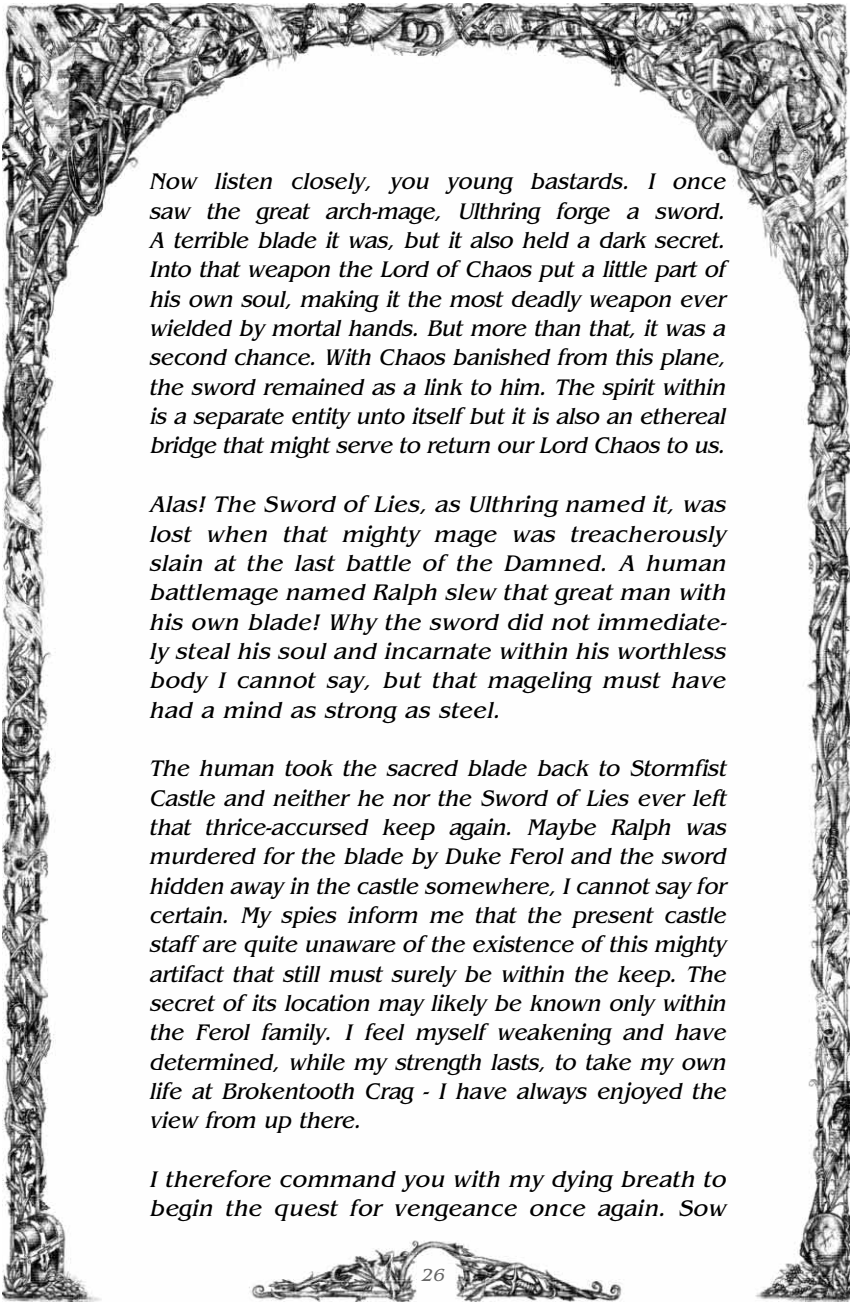


wolves. None of you has hurled war spells in open battle or labored over a hot branding iron for hours on end, marking prisoners to be sacrificed to our black-hearted Lord. Well, I have. And much respect it has earned me from you young fools!

In my heyday, we of the Damned lived and breathed with one purpose: to avenge the ancient wrongs done to our mighty Order. Those mortal pipsqueaks dared question our research! They murdered our Archwizard and drove us from Stormfist Castle like vagabonds! In the name of survival and vengeance, we were forced to make a pact with Hell - and the Seven Races then had the gall to call us 'the Damned' because our only allies were demons! They too are fools.

But do you know whom I despise even more than that rabble of semi-intelligent subspecies festering there in Rivellon? I despise you lot. Meekley content to be here in the mountains dabbling in minor hate-magics and petty storm gathering, you young fools don't know you're alive. Where's your sense of purpose? Where's the spirit of cold, ruthless hate we of the Damned were renowned for? Ha! Most of you have only committed half-a-dozen killings in your whole pointless lives, and most of those were the results of petty in-fighting within this Black Ring order of yours.

Heed my words, fools! You must all learn to direct your valuable destructive energies to a greater purpose! It is your born duty to torture, butcher, enslave and degrade every last member of the Seven Races of Rivellon for what they have done to us! Think of them down there living contentedly in their productive lives when their true destiny is to be at our feet as groveling servants or chattel for our beloved demon allies!



Now listen closely, you young bastards. I once saw the great arch-mage, Ulthring forge a sword. A terrible blade it was, but it also held a dark secret. Into that weapon the Lord of Chaos put a little part of his own soul, making it the most deadly weapon ever wielded by mortal hands. But more than that, it was a second chance. With Chaos banished from this plane, the sword remained as a link to him. The spirit within is a separate entity unto itself but it is also an ethereal bridge that might serve to return our Lord Chaos to us.

Alas! The Sword of Lies, as Ulthring named it, was lost when that mighty mage was treacherously slain at the last battle of the Damned. A human battlemage named Ralph slew that great man with his own blade! Why the sword did not immediately steal his soul and incarnate within his worthless body I cannot say, but that magingel must have had a mind as strong as steel.

The human took the sacred blade back to Stormfist Castle and neither he nor the Sword of Lies ever left that thrice-accursed keep again. Maybe Ralph was murdered for the blade by Duke Ferol and the sword hidden away in the castle somewhere, I cannot say for certain. My spies inform me that the present castle staff are quite unaware of the existence of this mighty artifact that still must surely be within the keep. The secret of its location may likely be known only within the Ferol family. I feel myself weakening and have determined, while my strength lasts, to take my own life at Brokentooth Crag - I have always enjoyed the view from up there.

I therefore command you with my dying breath to begin the quest for vengeance once again. Sow

*discord, spread misery and bring death to Rivellon. With the unity of the races truly sun-
dered, there may be enough disorder in the realm
to allow the return of our Lord Chaos.*

*Remember too that the Seven Races believe all
the Damned destroyed, and with my death that
will be truly so. They likely have no inkling that
you youngsters of the Black Ring even exist.
Use that ignorance as a cloak of shadows and
infiltrate their petty lives. You must bend your
wills and efforts to discovering a way to
reclaim the Sword of Lies, for it is the very key
to Hell itself. Now go forth my children -
undemine, spy, murder, rob and torture.*

*Commit every evil act you can think of against
our foes, retake the Sword of Lies and open the
gates of Hell.*

*That way, I will be able to return to congratulate you
properly - I, and all the dead Legion of the Damned.*

Yours in eternal darkness,

Zenfar Blutsporn





~ *THE END* ~